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MASTER FILE

DSSD CENSUS 2000 PROCEDURES AND OPERATIONS MEMORANDUM SERIES #M- 4

MEMORANDUM FOR Brian Monaghan
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Attention: Management Training Branch

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Subject: Census 2000 List/Enumerate Operation Observation Report -
 Merced, CA

BACKGROUND

The List/Enumerate (L/E) methodology is used in areas that have unreliable mail delivery or frequently use Post Office boxes, are remote, are very sparsely populated, and/or are not easily visited. With this methodology, the enumerator canvasses an assigned geographic area (Assignment Area - AA), mapspots all housing units (HUs), and enumerates the residents using the short or long form enumerator questionnaire based on a predetermined pattern identified within the listing book.

On April 4-6, 2000, I observed the L/E operation in and around Oakhurst, CA including the Yosemite National Park that is under the Merced, CA Local Census Office. All of the areas I observed had long form AA sampling rates of one-in-six.

OBSERVATION

On the morning of the first day (4/4) I went with an enumerator. To decide the AA boundaries, we went onto a dirt road from the main highway that then lead to a very rough dirt road. The road led to a single HU that after discussion with the occupant, was determined to be outside the AA. However, the enumerator took a short form interview anyway. The enumerator thought that the person who was assigned that AA may not be able to get to this HU.

The next HU we visited was designated for a long form. The man who was working in the back of the house said he did not want to deal with it then and said the enumerator should come back another time. The enumerator agreed after some effort to persuade the individual as it became obvious that further insistence may result in a complete refusal. Although it was not on the prescribed route of travel, we stopped at the next house we saw to get information on the number of HUs further down the road since it was a rough dirt road. The man seemed quite cooperative and told us there were two other HUs on the road and he would be there for a while and would give us an interview on our way back. After visiting the next two HUs where no one was at home, we returned to the first house to find he had left.

We visited a HU where we obtained a short form interview for a two-person family and were told of a neighboring cabin that they rent. In addition, the respondent claimed that she had been visited in September 1999 by a Census Bureau employee who had collected the same information. The enumerator obtained proxy information for the cabin in case no one was home. However, when we went to the cabin, someone was home and a short form interview was conducted.

In the afternoon I went with an enumerator to check on some possible HUs off a dirt road within Yosemite Park. I got a direct understanding of the difficulties in enumerating this type of area when the four-wheel drive rental vehicle I was driving got hung up in a patch of two feet deep snow. We contacted a crew leader who got us free.

On the morning of the second day (4/5), I met an enumerator who was a former Yosemite Park ranger and he showed me the diversity of housing within the park including private homes, summer camps, and employee housing.

I went out with an enumerator in the afternoon and we covered a section of the main highway and several roads that went off it. During the afternoon we completed 11 short form interviews and found no one home at four addresses. No one was home at the designated long form addresses. For one address where no one was at home, we talked with a man driving on the road who was familiar with the area and he said the house was in escrow and no one was currently living there. This address was designated for a short form and the enumerator would complete it later as a vacant unit. One road led to a locked gate. In explaining why the questionnaires were being delivered rather than mailed in this area the enumerator would sometimes state that it was because the area was undercounted during the last census.

On the third day (4/6) I went to a crew leader's home where the enumerators would pick up their assignments and drop off their completed work. The crew leader had two assistants. I went out with one of the crew leader assistants (CLAs) to do a quality assurance check on the listing for an assignment. The units to be checked had already been identified and we just had to visit them to ensure they were mapspotted correctly. The six units were checked and verified. The CLA was going to talk with the enumerator about distances since some map spots did not reflect distances properly.

I next went out with an enumerator to start a very large AA (roughly 200 HUs). Eventually, due to its size, the crew leader was going to split the work for the AA having one enumerator just go through and do the listing with different enumerators following behind to conduct the enumeration. However, to start with, the enumerator was going to list and enumerate as he went. We visited seven addresses, completed two short form interviews and one long form interview, found no one home at three addresses, and encountered a locked gate at one address. The gate had an electronic lock with a keypad entry system. A neighbor told us it lead to a vacation home. The long form interview was with a one person household and she refused many long form questions including those regarding income, disability, employment, and schooling saying that they were too invasive.

In the afternoon I went out with the other CLA. We first did a call back on an address for the fifth visit and again found no one at home. We next located an enumerator and had him report to the crew leader since there had been a question of the AA boundaries and another crew leader thought this enumerator was working in her AA. Finally, we went to check on an address to see if it had been enumerated. The occupant said they had and the CLA took the woman's name and phone number to verify they had the questionnaire.

GENERAL COMMENTS

Based on my observations, I have the following general comments.

1. Some roads were rough, ill-defined, self-maintained dirt paths.
2. Cooperation and communication among enumerators and crew leaders are essential in determining block/AA boundaries and traveling difficult roads.
3. Enumerators in L/E areas may have to alter the prescribed route of travel due to gated or blocked/impassable roads.
4. Many roads were gated. Although some were locked to maintain privacy, they were frequently gated to keep animals (dogs, cattle, or horses) on the property.
5. Respondents who did not wish to cooperate were generally not confrontational. They often avoided the enumerator rather than confront him/her.
6. The publicity in the area regarding the census operations in general and media pieces encouraging people to return their census forms in particular, had a mixed effect in this L/E area. On the positive side, there was an awareness that the census was going on and people would sometimes make a comment such as "I was expecting you" or "oh, you're finally here." On the down side, however, some people were defensive saying that they did not get a form to return. One respondent stated that she had called the telephone assistance number to request a questionnaire.

SUMMARY

All census personnel I encountered were very open and receptive to my observation. They were very accommodating and helpful throughout my stay.

The enumerators were professional and courteous at all times. Based on what I observed, the enumerators were making every effort to follow the sampling patterns as specified. I believe that deviations from procedures and the questionnaire wording were done in a sincere effort to minimize the inconvenience imposed on respondents and their chance of refusing further participation.

cc: DSSD Census 2000 Procedures and Operations Memorandum Series Distribution List
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